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THE INFLUENCE
—OF THE—
IRISH WOMAN
—ON THE—
NATIONAL MOVEMENT.

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LECTURE DELIVERED BY

JAMES REIDY,

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—BEFORE THE—
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WILLIAM OWEN ROE

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The Influence of the Irish Woman on the National Movement

From the earliest period, even long before the time about which what is considered authentic history has been written, woman was conspicuously identified with events in Ireland and her influence upon them was very considerable. When in other countries of Europe her position was unenviable in the extreme—when she received but scant consideration and had few of the rights that the most moderate of our latter-day women would insist upon having—the women of Ireland were making history, and from those far distant days down to this very hour they have continued to be history makers.

Because of the limited time at my disposal to-night, I must be brief in my treatment of the subject. I can only in running over the history of Ireland as it affects the Irish woman strike, as it were, the high places. If I succeed, however, in pointing out in an understandable way some of the things she has done for the conservation of Irish Nationality, what she can do, and what I feel confident she will do until the struggle for Nationhood and for the restoration of our cherished ideals is crowned with success, my object will be accomplished.

Glancing over the pages of the early history of Ireland we find indelibly traced upon them the names of *Scota*, the queen-mother of the Milesians; *Maeve*, the warrior queen, described by William Rooney in one of his poems as "The fiercest-hearted of Erin's daughters, the bravest nature that ever blazed;" *Grace O'Malley* or *Graine-uaille*, the daring and adventurous mistress of the western seaboard, and very many others

about each of whom a separate lecture might be given. Dr. Douglas Hyde in his "Literary History of Ireland" writes learnedly and graphically of the men and women who figure in her early story.

In the fifth century, when the gods of our Pagan forefathers were being dethroned and when the cross of the Christian-religion was being raised where the altars of the Druids stood, we see St. Brigid shedding the radiance of her saintly intellect upon the dissolving darkness of the time; and the grand example which she then set them has been followed by the women of the race down through the changeful centuries that have rolled by since then. The Irish woman has ever been the exemplar of all that is true and virtuous, patient, courageous and self-sacrificing.

In times of peace she has trained sons and daughters to teach the lessons of truth and to carry the blessings of enlightenment and civilization to other lands—not that so-called civilization imposed upon peoples at the point of the sword or the muzzle of the rifle. But it has been in the dark days of war, unrest and oppression that the grandest of her characteristics have manifested themselves.

The true Irish mother may be likened to the mother of the Saviour of mankind. Her heart, like that of the mother of the Nazarene, has been pierced by the shafts of sorrow, but the pain has been borne without repining and the light of hope has never been extinguished in her soul. God never made another human thing more grand, more pure

or more true than the Irish mother's heart.

The story of the Spartan mother, who, when her son was leaving her to go into battle for his country, said to him: "Come back with your shield or upon it," has been told and retold to an admiring world, but the mothers of Ireland have been saying and doing for more than a thousand years what the Spartan mother said and did.

When the Normans burst upon our "sundered" and feud-riven forefathers the invaders proved themselves fearless in battle, but they couldn't withstand the womanhood of Ireland. I'm sure many a native and foreigner has had the same experience since then. Thomas D'Arcy Magee, referring to this period and speaking for one of those Norman lords, makes him say:

"I would not give my Irish wife
For all the dames of Saxon land;
I would not give my Irish wife
For the Queen of France's hand.
For she to me is dearer
Than castles strong or lands or life—
An outlaw—so I'm near her,
To love till death my Irish wife."

"I knew the law forbade the banns,
I knew my king abhorred her race—
Who never bent before their clans
Must bow before their ladies' grace.
Take all my forfeited domain,
I cannot wage with kinsmen strife—
Take knightly gear and noble name
And I will keep my Irish wife."

When we consider what the women of our race have done why should any one of us turn to the history of another country when seeking for some inspiring story of womanly heroism, devotion or self-sacrifice? What need have we to peruse the history of France, where it tells of Joan of Arc, the maid of Orleans, who led her countrymen against the soldiery of England, or to read the story of the peasant warriors of Tyrol, who were banded together by Hofer for the protection of their rights, and who followed into battle against the Bavarians the daughter of Gamper, a village tailor. We can turn to the pages of Ireland's history and read countless tales just as thrilling and as glorious.

What event in the military annals of any country surpasses in dramatic interest the achievements of the women of Limerick, who, finding the soldiers of William of Orange beating back the defenders of their city from its walls, rushed into the conflict with whatever weapons they could lay their hands on? This is how Davis describes what took place when the women turned the tide of battle on the blood-soaked and fire-

swept bastions of the old city by the Shannon:

"Then fiercer grew the Irish yell,
And madly on the foe they fell
Till the breach grew like the jaws of hell—
Not the city of *Luimneach linn glas*."

"The women fought before the men,
Each man became a match for ten,
So back they pushed the villians then
From the city of *Luimneach linn glas*."

Let us turn our eyes to fateful '98, and our hearts will beat prouder and faster when we read the story of how a brave Irish girl at the battle of Ross saved the day for the insurgents. Their ammunition had been all but exhausted and they had no supply of their own to draw from, when into the blood and smoke of the fight rushed Mary Doyle, and with a scythe cut the belts of the fallen British soldiers and tossed their ammunition pouches in among her countrymen, and with the use of the powder and ball of the Hessians and the yeoman the battle of Ross was won.

In the North of Ireland by the blazing turf fires they tell with pride of Betsy Gray, of Granshaw, in the County Down, a heroine whose deeds were worthy of Deborah, the Hebrew prophetess and warrior, or Boadicea, the militant Queen of the Ancient Britons, who led her people against the Romans. Betsy Gray, with the gallant Munroe, at Ballynahinch, rallied the United Irishmen, and riding side by side with that intrepid leader led the pikemen of Down to the very mouths of the English cannon. When the fight was lost she, with her brother and her sweetheart, was butchered by the yeomanry, and she sleeps with the two whose fate she shared in the townland of Ballycreen, a few yards from the spot where she gave her brave young life for Ireland.

An inn kept by a faithful Irishwoman, named Molly Ward, near Belfast, was the headquarters and arsenal of the United Irishmen of that locality. Wolfe Tone frequently visited her place and many an important conference of the Northern leaders was held there. Two other women who played an important part in the United Irish movement were Mary Ann McCracken, the sister of Henry Joy McCracken and sweetheart of Thomas Russell, and Rose Hope, the wife of James Hope.

Emmet's ill-fated uprising in 1803 was glorified as much by the devotion and loyalty of his faithful servant, Anne Devlin, as by the character and patriotism of the fearless young leader himself. Though a large reward was offered for Emmet's arrest and though cajolery, threats and finally torture

were resorted to not one word about the whereabouts of her master would Anne Devlin say. To the undying shame of her countrymen be it said this faithful Irishwoman—faithful as ever God created—ended her days in abject poverty in a workhouse in 1851 and she was buried in a pauper's grave, from which Dr. Madden, the historian of the United Irishmen, on his return from Australia, aided by two or three other friends, had her bones removed to Glasnevin Cemetery. The spot where she now rests is marked by a cross upon which is carved the figure of an Irish wolf dog crouching upon a bed of shamrocks and beneath is the following inscription:

"To the memory of Anne Devlin (Campbell), the faithful servant of Robert Emmet, who possessed some rare and noble qualities; who lived in obscurity and poverty and so died, the 18th September, 1851, aged 70 years."

In '48 many women took an active and prominent part in the Young Ireland movement, and much of the brilliant prose and poetry of that period, written for the purpose of influencing and molding national opinion, was of their creation.

In the Fenian times—'65 and '67—there were numberless instances of the fidelity of the women to the old cause and their discretion, quickness of wit and pluck were not excelled by the men. In fact, to quote the words of a man who took a prominent part in the events of those days, "they knew how to keep their mouths shut better than the men."

I shall give you a few instances of what some of the women of Ireland did in those stirring days of Fenianism.

A Miss O'Connell, daughter of a head constable of police stationed at Caherciveen in the County Kerry, took all the rifles in the barrack where her father was in command out of the place, one by one, under her cloak, and turned them over to the local leaders, who were preparing so that they might be able to strike an effective blow for the old land when the call for action came. Miss O'Connell, being the daughter of the head constable, was not suspected, and the arms were not missed for several days after she had smuggled out the last one. When the barrack was attacked later by the Fenians, the garrison having no rifles with which to fight, had to surrender. In reporting the surrender the head constable, to save himself from being tried for neglect of duty, had to state that the arms were seized by the attacking party.

Women aided in making possible the escape to this country of Captain "Larry"

O'Brien, of New Haven, after he had succeeded in getting out of Clonmel Jail, where he was awaiting trial. Captain Geary, while on "the run" in West Limerick, was saved from arrest on at least one occasion by the ready wit of two young women who lived in the neighborhood of Ardagh.

When Dennis Duggan, who was afterwards carpenter on the Catalpa, which rescued the Fenian prisoners from Australia, was arrested in Dublin in '67 a boy ran to his house and told the news to his sister, Lizzie Duggan. Duggan had brought a rifle across with him from England and had taken it apart and secured it to the bottom of the shelves of his tool chest. Before the girl had time to do anything a party of police burst into the place to search it. They opened the tool chest and passed their hands over the tops of the shelves, but forgot to search the under sides. Unable to find any arms the police left. The Duggan girl thought they were likely to return and make a more careful search when they thought she would be off her guard, so she determined to take the rifle out of its hiding place and carry it to a friend's house for safe keeping. Putting it under her cloak she started down stairs. When she was half way down the police re-entered for the purpose of making a second search as she had expected. Instead of screaming or going into a fit and thus making discovery of what she carried concealed under her cloak inevitable, she stepped aside and let the police pass her on their way upstairs. She concluded on the instant that it was safer for her to stand still than continue down the narrow stairs up which they were climbing. When the last of the party had passed her by she left the house and took the rifle to a place of safety.

When James Stephens escaped from Richmond Bridewell he was conducted from outside the prison wall to the house of Mrs. Boland, in Brown street. Mrs. Boland was a sister to James O'Connor, the present Member of Parliament for West Wicklow, and it was her younger brother, John, then little more than a boy, who conducted the escaped Fenian chief to his hiding place.

From Brown street Mrs. Boland moved to Prussia street, taking Stephens with her. He remained secreted in her place while the search for him was carried on with the greatest vigor by the Government. So hot did the trail become at one time that the police actually visited her house, but she by her quickness of wit staved off the search until Stephens had time to get away. Let it be borne in mind despite the frequently made statement that if "you put one Irish-

man on the spit another will turn him" Stephens' presence in Dublin and his place of concealment were known to several, and although there was a large reward offered for his apprehension, not one word of information concerning him or his whereabouts was ever given to the authorities.

When Stephens could no longer remain with safety in Mrs. Boland's he went to another woman's house—to Mrs. Butler's, in Kildare street—nearly opposite the Kildare Street Club, which is the Tory headquarters in Ireland. Mrs. Butler conducted a fashionable dressmaking business, and her customers were mainly wealthy people who belonged to the loyalist class, and their sympathies were, of course, anti-Irish. Stephens and his wife were sheltered in her place for months. Colonel Kelly, who was his chief of staff, and John Nolan, another of the prominent men of the movement, who died a few years later in Leavenworth, Kansas, visited there frequently during this time, and at least two important meetings of the leaders were held in the house. When Mrs. Butler was asked if she didn't think it dangerous to have those meetings held in her place her answer was: "I am willing to take the risk." It was from that house Stephens went aboard the vessel which took him to France.

Later on the news leaked out that Mrs. Butler had harbored the Fenian chief, her wealthy customers deserted her, and, as a consequence, she died in poverty, but was never known to murmur or regret what she had done. Her daughter, Sarah Jane Butler, wrote some very good poetry in *The Nation* under the initials "S. J. B."

In the latter stages of Fenianism, previous to the "rising," it was through Ellen O'Leary, the poetess and sister of John O'Leary, and Catharine Mulcahy, sister of Denis Dowling Mulcahy, that orders were sent to the local leaders throughout the country. A corps of women were engaged in carrying the dispatches, and they performed their allotted duty with faithfulness and discretion.

This hurried narrative of what the Irish woman did in the movement of '65 and '67 would be incomplete were I to omit the story of the self-sacrifice of one humble Irish mother.

In the neighborhood of Thurles, in the County Tipperary, lived a Mrs. Sheehy, a bedridden widow, with her only son, who was her sole means of support. They rented a small farm of about five acres and he engaged in the business of cattle dealing and used the little holding as a "stand," where he kept the cattle he purchased at one fair

until another fair came on at which he could dispose of them. In this way he managed to make a decent livelihood and to keep his mother and himself comfortably.

Sheehy was a member of the Fenian organization, and when the call came what did that poor invalid woman do? Did she entreat him, the sole comfort and support of her declining years, to stay at home, and remind him of the duty he owed her who had brought him into the world? No; to use his own words: "She struggled to sit up and tied a fine green sash over my shoulders, and, kissing me, said, 'God guard you, *alanna*.' 'Tis sad an' hard to part with you, but Ireland calls you an' your poor old mother can't tell you stay. Go an' do your duty with the other brave boys, an' may God an' Mary send ye success."

Sheehy was later on arrested, tried and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. After serving about four years of his time he was released on condition that he would come straight to America. The poor fellow was drowned in the Detroit River in the early seventies.

When most of the Fenian leaders were thrown into prison and when those who succeeded in escaping arrest had to remain in hiding waiting for the expected call to arms it was a ladies' committee that collected funds and arranged for the defence of the men as they were brought to trial. The government agents sought to intimidate the women in this work, but they refused to give it up. The ladies most prominent on the committee were Mrs. Thomas Clarke Luby, who was a daughter of J. D. Frazer, one of the Young Ireland poets, Ellen O'Leary and Mrs. O'Donnovan Rossa.

In the stormiest days of the Parnell movement, too, when the prominent men were in jail, the women stepped into the breach, and, bidding defiance to the government, carried on the work.

You are all familiar with the influence the women of our race have had on the Irish Revival movement, which, starting a little more than a decade ago, has in that comparatively short space of time accomplished great things in the de-Anglicization of Ireland. No Irish poetess has written in English more beautiful and inspiring verse than the late Mrs. MacManus, better known as "Ethna Carbery." Her songs have, like sweet, strong bugle notes, stirred the hearts and re-awakened the National energies of Ireland. Her loss to the cause which she loved and served with all the strength and fervor of her intensely earnest Celtic nature can never be fully appreciated.

It is unnecessary for me to refer particu-

larly to the many women who are to-day working for Irish-Ireland. You are all as familiar with their names and with what they are doing as I am. I believe one of the reasons why the Gaelic movement has taken such a strong hold upon our people is that the women have been allowed to participate in it on terms of equality with the men. The women of a race are essentially the teachers of a race. The mother's influence is the first felt and the last forgotten.

If the Irish woman has not done and is not doing more to teach her children their duty to the motherland, the fault is not altogether hers. Sufficient attention has never been given by the leaders of National movements to the Irish woman as a factor in making those movements successful, and as a consequence a large number of Irish women know very little about Irish history or political conditions. The same can, of course, be said with truth of a large number of Irish men. The women have been given to understand that the political field is for man exclusively and that woman should concern herself chiefly with the affairs of the home. The different religious creeds have all along recognized the good that woman can do in teaching and diffusing their doctrines, and as by nature the Irish woman is pious, virtuous and faithful, she has taken a lively interest in religious work. The result has been that many an Irish mother who felt that she would not be fulfilling her duty to God if she did not, in season and out of season, teach her children to be faithful Christians neglected that other duty—the inculcation of love of country altogether. The Church pointed out her duty as a Christian, and she did it; the National leaders failed to show her what she owed to Ireland, and she did not realize in consequence that she had a second important mission to perform.

The true Irish mother should teach love of country as well as love of God, and should be able to instruct her offspring how to differentiate between the one and the other. She cannot do this unless she herself has a clear understanding of the matter, and for the purpose of making such an understanding general I hope greater efforts will be made in the future, so that the duty of every Irish mother may be made plain.

And it is not with the children alone that the women of the race can do good. Many husbands, brothers and sweethearts badly need a lesson, and several lessons, in National duty, and woman as a schoolmistress can accomplish wonders in those cases.

I intended when I first decided on speaking to you on this subject to confine myself

wholly to a discussion of what the Irish woman of the present can do for Irish Nationalism, but on second thought I deemed it best to give some instances of what she has done, from the story of the past, believing that their recital might serve as an incentive and an inspiration to those whom I have the pleasure of addressing.

Let us now consider for a few moments some of the things that each Irish mother can do for Ireland.

She can inculcate race pride, which is the very foundation upon which love of country and everything that pertains to Nationality—religion, language and customs included—rests. She can teach her children that to accomplish anything for Ireland they must be discreet, persistent, thorough, realizing the necessity for attending to the small things as well as the big ones. She can teach them to keep the main issue ever in view and not to be diverted into side paths by prospects however alluring they may appear at the time. She can teach them to follow principles, not men, and that when a leader fails to be guided by principle, no matter what his personality may be, he no longer deserves their confidence and adherence. It was the disposition to follow the chieftain whether he was right or wrong that made the English invasion of Ireland possible, and the same thing constitutes one of the reasons for the continuance of English rule. The interest of the clan was placed above the National interest, and as a consequence division and disaster followed. Lack of adequate preparation has been also one of the causes of the failure of Irish National efforts for centuries.

Irish mothers in this country have another and a most important duty to perform—they should see to it that the mental food supplied their children at whatever school they attend is not of the kind likely to produce in them false ideas regarding their race, or its enemies, who are working persistently and insidiously to undermine it here as well as at home. Most mothers are satisfied to send their children to school, trusting to those having charge of the school to teach them the right thing and all that it is desirable they should know.

When we find subjects which every young person belonging to our race should have a knowledge of, discriminated against even in our Catholic schools and colleges, and things taught instead which might be very well left untaught, it is time for us to wake up. I have in mind as I speak one particular Catholic college which has been given a donation by a certain Irish organization for educational purposes. A list of the subjects

for an examination for prizes provided by this donation was recently published by the college I refer to, and the list was as un-Irish as any that ever emanated from the so-called National Commissioners of Education in Ireland. The Irish language had no place on the programme, and there was evident discrimination against Irish history, while English history got a favored place. Fancy a fund contributed by an Irish organization for education along the right lines being diverted from the purpose for which its contributors intended it to be used, and diverted too by people who should take a friendly interest in the honor and well-being of our race, their own race, even if they never received one cent of a donation.

We have an undoubted right before God and man to have something to say as to what the children will be taught in the public as well as in the private schools, to the support of which we contribute. If anyone is teaching things that are false, or injurious to them, we should know the reason why, and if they are not taught things which they should be taught we should have something to say on the matter too.

There is work for the men and women of the Irish race in America on this question alone to keep them busy for a long time. Much of the mental food supplied to the young people is poisoned, and where it is not poisoned it is tainted or not of the right kind.

What would you think of fathers or mothers who would allow food which they knew to be adulterated or unsuited to the constitutions of their children to be given to them, and who, finding the diet was harmful, would not change it? Wouldn't you brand those fathers and mothers as monsters of inhumanity and invoke the aid of the law to compel them to treat their offspring humanely or else suffer for their misconduct? Yet, how many Irish parents never for a moment stop to examine the mental pabulum, so productive of National dyspepsia, upon which their children are fed? What wonder is it that a large number of those children, when they grow up to be men and women, being ignorant of the glories of their ancient race, either despise

it or take no interest in matters that affect it?

American history is falsified to suit the Anglo-Saxon propaganda, Irish history and literature are ignored, and the result is that the child of Irish parents grows up ashamed of the race and believing that he or she is an Anglo-Saxon. When a child becomes ashamed of the race there is grave danger that in time that child will become ashamed of the religion so closely associated with the race. This is a fact that Catholic educators generally do not seem to recognize, yet the truth of it is demonstrated every day. At present the Irish mother, if she wants her children to know anything about Ireland, must teach it to them herself, or the father must do it.

There should be a few good pictures descriptive of notable incidents in the history of Ireland in every Irish home, and pictures also of some of the men and women whose names are prominently inscribed in the story of the race. The children will ask questions about those pictures and their interest in things Irish will be awakened. In every Irish household, too, there should be some books on Irish history, literature and poetry, and the children should be encouraged to read them. There are several short histories of Ireland written in such a way as not to tire the young mind. Let the home be made the school where love of Ireland will be taught and the lessons will bear abundant fruit.

I have endeavored to point out to you that the Irish woman has been tried and never found wanting in any crisis in the history of our people in the past, and I feel confident and hopeful that if the women of the race to-day are shown their duty to the land of their birth or of their fathers they will perform it fully. I am sure woman will figure prominently in the ultimate triumph of our cause, and that the historians of the future will give her due credit for all she has wrought and suffered for the home land. May it ever be the mission of the Irish mother to rear children true to Freedom and to everything that ennobles and exalts mankind.









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